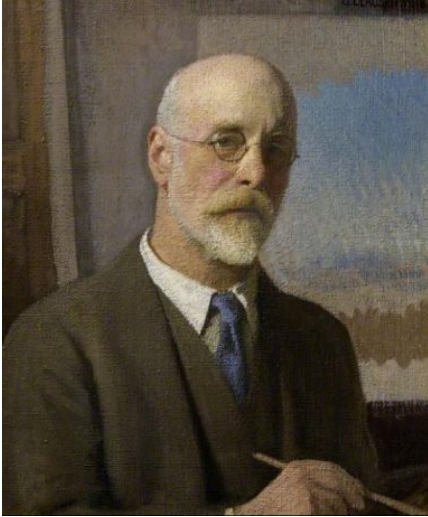




The Hundred Parishes

Introduction to a famous local person . . .

GEORGE CLAUSEN (1852 - 1944)



George Clausen was a prolific artist who captured the spirit of rural life, particularly in northwest Essex. This self portrait hangs in the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge. He was born at William Street, Regents Park, London in 1852, the son of a painter of Dutch descent. He studied at South Kensington School of Art between 1873 and 1875.

In 1881 George married Agnes, daughter of George Webster of Kings Lynn, and they had three sons and two daughters. After their marriage they first lived in Berkshire and then in Widdington and Duton Hill.

George was a founder member of the New English Art Club which held exhibitions for young artists as a potential stepping stone towards exhibiting at the Royal Academy.

Clausen was elected an Associate of the Royal Academy in 1895 and became a full Academician in 1906. He became a professor of painting at the Royal Academy Schools and his popular lectures were often published. Between 1876 and 1943 he exhibited regularly at the Royal Academy.

During the First World War, at the age of 65, he was appointed an official war artist, based in England.

George and his family moved to Widdington in 1891 and lived at Bishops House. When he left there in 1905 he donated his wooden studio to the village as a reading room. It later became the Mens' Club and the current village hall was built on the site.

14th-century Prior's Hall Barn in Widdington (now English Heritage) is thought to have been the inspiration of many of George's paintings of Essex barns. George painted a portrait of the rector of Widdington, the reverend James Court, which is now privately owned. In 1894 he painted "the little head of Emmy Wright" and sold the picture to Vernon Wethered for £26 and 5 shillings. In the 1891 census of Widdington, Emily (Emmy) was the eldest of five children of Frederick Wright, bricklayer. They lived on Main Street and she was 13 years old. In 1901 she is listed as "assistant school teacher".

In 1927, Clausen was asked to paint a mural on the wall of St. Stephen's Hall, House of Commons. The title was The English People Reading Wycliffe's English Bible. This and other paintings were unveiled by Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin. Soon after, George was knighted for his service to art.

Also in 1927, he bought a house called Hillside in Duton Hill as a rural retreat. In 1931 he gifted the house to his son, Hugh, but continued to visit until his death. George's sons attended Newport Grammar School and he painted a portrait of the headmaster, William Waterhouse, which still hangs in the school library.

Amongst his paintings that hang in the Tate Gallery, London are *A Frosty March Morning* (1904), painted in Widdington, and *The Road, Winter Morning* (1923), featuring Barnard's Farm opposite his house in Duton Hill. *The Road to Tilty* is in the Leeds Museum and *Winzes Farm* (1905-1910), painted at Widdington, hangs in the Bradford Gallery.

Sir George Clausen died in 1944 at Newbury, Berkshire just seven months after his wife. His obituary was printed in *The Times*. On their tombstone in Newbury is the following inscription:

“They came to this village during the war and died here. He would have chosen to rest in the Essex countryside that he loved and painted. She would have chosen to be wherever he was.”

Online gallery: www.the-athenaeum.org/art/list.php?m=a&s=tu&aid=2863

Further reading: *George Clausen and the Picture of English Rural Life*, Kenneth McConkey, 2012, published by Atelier Books.

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